

Ethiopia 1942-1974: The Hailé Selassié Years

Objective: This exhibit presents an overview of the stamps and rates that were used during the reign of Hailé Selassié after his restoration to the throne in 1942 through 1974, the year of his death.

Exhibition Plan: The material is laid out in strict chronological order, starting with the March 1942 Provisional Restoration Issue and ending with the August 1974 World Population Year issue. Rates are discussed as part of the write-up accompanying various covers as they are presented. Stamps, traveled covers, first day covers and related philatelic items are used to illustrate this time period.

Ethiopian Postal Rates: Even though the Ministry of Posts, Telegraphs, and Telephone had the authority to determine and set postage rates, the Ministry did not officially publish any rates until 1961. Moreover, no written rates for the period of 1942-1961 have been found. Based on observation, the rates have been reconstructed and changed many times during this period, generally decreasing with each new rate period. The rate periods used herein begin on: 1946; March 1952; November 1958; June 1959; September 1961; September 1962; and July 1973. The rates between 1942-1946 appear to have depended on the particular carrier and destination and no consistent pattern has yet appeared.

Challenge Factor: Mint and used stamps for this time period are relatively easy to locate. Finding postally used covers for the various rate periods represents the greatest challenge for this time period. Prior to the take over by the Italians in the 1930s, the rates were relatively simple - generally a few rates for external and a few rates for internal postage along with additions for registration, advice of receipt etc. After the restoration, there were some 22-25 rates depending on continent and country plus registration, advice of receipt, printed matter etc. giving a potential for several hundred rates for each period.

Historical Context: Hailé Selassié was restored to the throne of Ethiopia on 5 May 1941. England made a grant of 3 million Pounds Sterling to help get the government re-established. The United States helped considerably by providing aid through its Lend-Lease program. The period between the 1940s-1950s was spent reestablishing the Selassié government and firmly solidifying his rule over Ethiopia. During the 1960s-1970, Hailé Selassié became a very important figure in pan-African and international politics and was considered by most countries to be the "wise old man" of Africa. Despite his success on the world political stage, troubles began festering in Ethiopia. As the freedom movement and de-colonialization of Africa proceeded, Ethiopians were pressing for greater reforms. The Selassié government made token efforts at reform but never provided enough in the way of reforms to satisfy the populace. This discontent gave rise to a number of increasingly violent anti-Selassié factions. Eventually, the Derg (Provisional Socialist Government of Ethiopia) took over the local radio station and subsequently murdered the Emperor by suffocating him between two mattresses on between 26 and 27 August 1974. His remains were placed in a cement coffin placed under the kitchen of the house where he lived.